Reassessing acceptability judgments: methodology, models, and alternatives

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In this talk I’d like to

▶ give you an overview of available acceptability judgment paradigms
▶ raise some questions concerning the interpretation of judgments
▶ provide a tool for evaluate predictions of possible results
▶ suggest some add-ons/alternatives to simple acceptability judgments
Acceptability is not Grammaticality

**Grammaticality**
Grammaticality describes the property of a linguistic structure as belonging to a set of elements described/defined by a given grammar.

**Acceptability**
Acceptability describes the intuition of (native) speakers expressing the ranking of a linguistic structure relative to a set of (possibly implicit) linguistic entities.
Paradigms and data types

**Closed scales**
- Binary judgments → nominal scale/ordinal scale
- Categorial judgments → ordinal scale
  x point scale
- Continuous judgments → ordinal scale/interval scale

**Semi) Open scales**
- Magnitude estimation → ratio scale
- Thermometer judgments → ordinal scale/interval scale
- Origo judgments → ordinal scale/interval scale
If a structure is highly ungrammatical (90%) why would it in 10 out of 100 speakers/stimuli turn out as grammatical?

What would this imply? Large speaker/item variation?
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What would this imply? Large speaker/item variation?

More likely that 10 data points (short) below the threshold, say 45%, and 90 data points are (shortly) above the threshold, say 55%.

Generally you would need some measure of variance to decide where most of the point may lie. → not available
The acceptability space

Reassessing acceptability judgments

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Acceptability = Grammaticality + Processibility + ...?

- The influence of language processing on acceptability is not deniable (landscape for grammatical structures to emerge)
- grammatically acceptable & psychologically inacceptable (Miller and Isard, 1964, p. 294)

(1) The man [who said [that a cat [that the dog chased] killed the rat]] is a liar.

- Influence of context (Crain and Steedman, 1985; Fanselow et al., 2008)
- How can we estimate/exclude these other factors?
**Time pressure**

- Speeded acceptability judgment
- Speed accuracy trade-off procedure (SAT) (Wickelgren, 1977; McElree, 2000)

- Time pressure may give you an indication for the processing difficulty.
- Participant with greater processing abilities will judge structure acceptable and participant with smaller abilities will judge them unacceptable.

**Additional measures**

- confidence: How sure are you?
- plausibility
Alternatives methodologies

Especially for non-normative populations (children, learners, impaired population) comprehension or production task may provide more insights than acceptability judgments

- Sentence matching task
- Production tasks
- Elicited imitation tasks
- act-out-tasks
Ask and try to answer the following questions when you are designing your experiment:

- Which task is best suited for my material/population?
- What (kind of results) do I expect?
- What kind of data will I get?
- How can I analyze this data?
- What do the result possibly explain?
Thanks for your attention

How would you rate this presentation?

☐ waste of time  ☐ boring  ☐ not bad  ☐ interesting  ☐ helpful